

ABSTRACT

SIDEWAYS FROM MOSCOW: URI NISSAN GNESSIN'S
PROVINCIAL WRITING

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This article explores the representation of provincial space in Uri Nissan Gnessin's *Sideways*. By analyzing the way in which Gnessin constitutes the lives of three young Jewish sisters living in the Pale of Settlement at the turn of the twentieth century, I argue that his novella sets the ground for a new understanding of a provincial town, namely as a modernist space. In order to characterize this space, the article compares *Sideways* to Chekov's seminal play *Three Sisters*. This comparative reading explores a crucial difference between the chronotopes of the two literary texts. While *Three Sisters* depends on the metropolitan space of Moscow, which serves as an absent presence in the play, Gnessin imagines a provincial space for which the metropolis does not function as its gravitational force. The contextualization of the relationship between time and space in *Sideways* within current theories of space and modernism underscores the unique features of Gnessin's early modernism, which does not rely on a metropolitan chronotope. Instead, it is connected to the provincial space that Gnessin associates with his female protagonists. Thus, from an epistemic standpoint, moving sideways holds a twofold meaning: on the aesthetic level it reflects literary issues that were on the margins of Hebrew literary discourse (as Dan Miron has argued), and on the poetic level it constitutes the representational space of a province in which young Eastern European Jewish women became agents of cultural change.